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An Essay on the Bilious Fever as it has presented itself within the last three or four years in a southeastern district of Virginia. —

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To the Medical faculty of the University of Pennsylvania the following essay is respectfully submitted for the degree of Doctor of Medicine by the author.

It is not my intention in the following essay to enter into any detailed account of the Bilious Fever, as it commonly presents itself here and in other parts of our country, or to undertake to add anything to what has already been said on the subject by medical writers: but after making a few preliminary remarks, merely to give a general and concise account of the disease as it has appeared in the district beforementioned, together with the different modes of practice pursued in its management.

The disease in question has been marked by symptoms unusually malignant and has been the subject of considerable medical discussion.
The opinions entertained as to its nature

have been very diversified, and consequently different modes of practice advocated.

The disease under consideration is evidently only a variety of the ordinary bilious fever of our climate, to which have been superadded symptoms of a much more formidable character, corresponding in its general characteristics, with the cold cases of Yellow fever, described by our distinguished countryman Dr Rush also ~~with~~ the yellow fever of Natchez described by Dr Cartwright of that place under the descriptive character of the ataxic form of fever, and with the Typhus Icterodes of the West Indies. It also bears some resemblance to the congestive form of fever, treated of by Dr Armstrong in his very able work on Typhus fever.

Previously to entering on the immediate history of this disease, I would observe, that the weather within the last three or four years, has been intensely warm, during the summer and autumnal months, particularly during the last year, when the disease prevailed much more generally, than at any time previously.

There was also an unusual quantity of rain during the winter and spring months of the same year. — It may be well to remark also that the section of country, in which this peculiar form of disease prevails, is low and abounds in miasmatic situations, such as swamps, millponds &c. —

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In the commencement the disease assumes the symptoms which characterize the common bilious fever, with some modification.

It is ushered in with a chill, which is followed by considerable fever, accompanied by sick stomach, headache &c. The pulse is frequent though not possess of the same degree of strength and fulness as in ordinary bilious cases. The tongue is furred with a white appearance.

In the course of one, two or three days and sometimes later, after the complaint discovers itself, symptoms of a more formidable character supervene. — Evident symptoms of prostration come on rapidly, the extremities become cold, without any sense of a chill on the part of the patient

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accompanied with a cold perspiration while at the same time the body is extremely hot to the touch and the patient complains of intolerable heat. —

The pulse now becomes very quick and weak, and sometimes disappears entirely at the wrist. To the foregoing symptoms were also added in many cases, a distressing nausea, attended with a bilious vomiting, a marked determination to the head evinced by delirium, or a comatose state and pain occasional ly in different other parts of the body, more particularly about the right or left hypochondrium and lower part of the abdomen, indicating a congestion in some of the abdominal viscera; The respiration was frequently hurried and uneasy.

The tongue at this stage puts on a yellow or brown incrustation and the alvine evacuations are of a very green or dark appearance — The bile vomited is also frequently of a green or indigo colour, and sometimes presenting a very dark appearance, approaching to what is called the black vomit by writers. The skin is frequently of a yellow colour. —

The account given furnishes a general outline of the symptoms, which however uniform in their general character are distinguished by different grades of violence and of danger. In some instances the symptoms of congestion and prostration are slight and easily subdued; in other instances, so rapid are their increase

that the patient although apparently labouring under little disease, at their first accession, would in the course of two or three hours, sometimes be found in articulo mortis.

As to the causes of the disease there is room for some diversity of opinion and speculation. It cannot be ascribed solely to the usual causes of bilious fevers such as miasmata from marshy situations &c For during the existence of the same local causes, with very little variation for a number of years preceding the commencement of this complaint, only the common bilious affections prevailed. We are therefore under the necessity of referring to some other cause, and as the more probable, we should see

fact the additional agency of some unknown or inexplicable state of the atmosphere.

The symptoms of prostration and congestion, which characterise this disease, serve to distinguish it from the ordinary forms of fever, while at the same time, the bilious vomiting, furred tongue, &c sufficiently distinguish it as a species of bilious derangement.

As to the prognosis in this disease, it may be formed from observing the state of the principal symptoms. Where the prostration is extreme and obstinately continues, notwithstanding, the use of remedies, attended with delirium or a comatose state and where the gastric symptoms are urgent, the event will generally prove fatal. But when the gastric symptoms, and ~~the~~ prostration of the system are less urgent, and the eye

tem kindly reacts under the use of remedies we may generally suspect a manage able disease.

It may be gathered from has been said, that I consider the disease in question as a peculiar form of bilious derange ment, connected with a congestive state of the system, the effect of this partic ular derangement.

But in what precisely, the proximate cause of this disease differs from that in ordinary bilious affections, we cannot clear ly decide, so light, hitherto, as far as I am informed, having been thrown on the subject by dissections. —

In the treatment of this disease as we before observed, very different modes of practice have been pursued by practitioners. But the most rational and by far the most successful is that deducible from two leading indications, to wit, first the removal of the bilious symptoms present, and secondly, the production of a reaction in the system with a view of relieving the congestion.—

Besides the leading indications above mentioned, there are commonly other accidental and minor circumstances requiring particular attention, which will be noticed hereafter.—

To accomplish the first indication, or to remove the urgent bilious symptoms, mercurial purgatives were chiefly confided in. The Sub-muriate of mercury was accord

ingly given in divided doses, or in the quantity of three or four grains every two or three hours so as to produce a gradual though effectual operation, ajisting the medicine after the exhibition of several doses (the quantity to be regulated by the strength of the patient and the violence of the symptoms) by some gentle purgative, such as the Oleum Ricini, together with enemata.

When a complete, though gradual operation was procured in this way, the pulse though weak at first, became stronger, reaction of the system took place and the more urgent symptoms were relieved — It was then necessary to continue the mercurial purgatives in the same way, only in a smaller quantity, until the bilious evacuations, afo-

sumed a more natural appearance when the urgent symptoms were much relieved.— After which the well regulated use of milder purgatives, such as the Sulphate of Magnesia alone or in combination with senna, were sufficient, until the cure was accomplished. In some very violent cases it was found essential to urge the use of the mercury to the extent of a moderate salivation. Where the system was very much prostrated, it was common to combine two or three grains of camphor, with each dose of Calomel

Some practitioners adopting the views of Dr. Cartwright and others in relation to the Modus operandi of mercury, have given calomel in doses of twelve or fifteen grains in combination with small portions of

opium, three or four times in the course of the twenty four hours, and with the most flattering results, as they report. I have myself seen the most beneficial effects, result from the use of a combination of Calomel and Dovers powder. — With a view of answering the second indication or that of bringing about a reaction of the system and relieving the congestion, in addition to the remedies already enumerated, which had a considerable effect in that way, as already observed, other auxiliary remedies were sometimes indispensably necessary The more prominent resources for this purpose, consisted in the application of blisters to different parts of the body more particularly to the chest and sides, sinapisms to the extremities, stimula

ting embrocations &c. The warm bath and the application of hot bricks to the body have been reported to be beneficial.

As to venesection, however, beneficial it may have been in ordinary bilious cases, when there was a full, open, strong pulse, yet in the disease under consideration, so prostrated were the energies of the system, that it was entirely inadmissible. The remedy has been advocated by some, on the principle, that its use gradually unloads the system as it were, producing a revulsion and in that way relieving the congestive symptoms. Although the theory in regard to its modus operandi may be specious and the practice in particularly oppressed states of the system might answer, if directed with caution and discrimination, yet as a gener

-al rule, I am confident, from an attentive observation of the symptoms and the effect of remedies that the practice would prove highly detrimental.

The observations just made in relation to venesection, do not apply equally to topical bloodletting; though few practitioners have ever ventured even to detract blood in this way. I have no doubt but that the abstraction of blood from the back of the neck or temples, by cups or leeches, (the quantity to be determined by the effect produced) would have a fine effect in obviating or removing the determination to the head and in relieving the pain and delirium consequent thereon. In the same way the topical abstraction of blood from the chest and hypochondriac regions would relieve the pain and congestion of the sub

jacent organs and should always be had recourse to, in severe cases, previously to the application of blisters to those parts.

As to the use of emetics, the observations just made in relation to the impropriety or rather impracticability of general bloodletting are equally applicable. Their known effect is to relax the system, and to produce at any rate, considerable temporary languor, a situation which illy accorded with the already enfeebled powers of nature. —

By some practitioners, of respectability too, stimulants were principally resorted to: but it would seem that in this particular case, they had suffered their fears (created by the alarming nature of the symptoms in some cases) to blind their judgements and from having formed incorrect opinions as to the nature of the disease, consequently

deduced as incorrect practice. To answer their purpose of stimulating, toddy was given by some to the amount of several quarts in the course of the twenty-four hours, along with a variety of other stimulants and tonics in the same space of time to a considerable amount, such as Ether, Camphor, bark &c. This practice in my opinion was only calculated to add fuel to the fire, and so far from relieving the debility, tended only to increase the restlessness and anxiety of the patient; and further prostrate the energies of the system.—

It moreover involved a gross departure from principles established ever since the time of the illustrious Sydenham, who expunged from the science, an augean mass of error and incongruity, and placed it on a basis, at once, rational, highly liberal, and cul

treated. — The advocates of the practice relate instances where the patients recovered under unpromising circumstances, after the use of those remedies. Admitting the fact, it does not prove that the remedies effected the cure. The maxim post hoc, ergo propter hoc when applied in medicine is sometimes perfectly deceptive and fallacious.

The recovery of patients therefore under certain modes of treatment, should in our opinion, be attributed, not to the remedies employed, but to the recuperative efforts of nature alone, which accomplish the cure. —

I mentioned that besides the leading indications, there were generally other accidental minor symptoms requiring particular attention — These were an excessive nausea or bilious vomiting, and a repetition of the

chills, the accession of which, was not unfrequently, associated with alarming symptoms.

To relieve the nausea or bilious vomiting, the use of the usual anti-emetic medicines were resorted to; such as equal parts of lime water and new milk – opium pill, and particularly the application of a blister to the region of the stomach.

In the event of a repetition of the chills after first clearing the stomach, when there was a fair remission, approximating to an intermission, the sulphate of Quinine acted like a charm in checking the chill and arresting the farther progress of the disease

It may be remarked, in conclusion, that when the proper remedies had been successfully employed, that convalescence

was uncommonly rapid in this disease.